5.2 The child in the family

Within this collective framework of family, children also have a 'self'. In the consultations, this "self" is expressed in children's distinctive responses to what hurts them, brings them joy, their likes and dislikes, fears, and individual opinions that they hold. The spirit of 'selfhood' characterizes each individual girl and boy as different from each another. The way that family is organized means that a child's expression of her or his 'self' is dependent on parents giving him or her the opportunity or support to do so.

Although every human being has a self, in the Afghan context, the idea of 'self' or individual identity often conflicts or merges with the expectations of family. Sometimes girls and boys can experience internal conflict between the needs of their individual selves and the needs or hopes of their family. When children raise concern over things they experience as oppressive within the family, they generally do not argue against the family. Rather, feelings of loyalty and a learnt sense of respect for elders means they tend to comply with what the family wants.

For example, a group of girls in Mazar spoke about their parents not letting them play outside[3]. They said they didn't like this and wanted to play. When asked what they would like to do to change this, they said they would accept what their parents said. In this way children do not position themselves in opposition to the family, despite sometimes feeling oppressed within it.

Because children are not inclined to disagree with their parents, they tend to keep many feelings inside themselves. Although they listen to and obey their parents, being silenced or denied choice and nevertheless make them feel sad and can lead to a build up of resentment and anger.

Girls and boys frequently express strong views about wanting to be given the right to be heard and make autonomous choices on issues affecting their lives. They also show a willingness to take responsibility in order to be granted these choices. There are few areas of family, community, regional, national or international decision-making that do not affect children. Children have the fundamental right, according to article 12 of the CRC, to be consulted and express opinions on "all matters", including those concerning his or her own marriage, choice of occupation, education and recreation.

I wish I could have the chance to decide about my future
Girl 15-18, Jalalabad

When children are not listened to I feel sad
Boy 11-14 Herat

I feel sad when they do not allow us to play
Boy 11-14 Maslakh Camp

I would like to go to a school of my own choice
Boy 11-14 Surkh Rood

[3] Conversations held with school children during a follow up visit by the consultant in Mazar I Shareef

5.3 Freedoms experienced by children and controlling factors that limit these freedoms

In some of the consultation groups, girls and boys in the 11-18 age groups were asked about what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do in their lives. Prior to this, children were given information about child rights. The idea behind asking these questions was to understand how girls and boys see themselves as individuals with rights.

From this enquiry, several things have been learnt. Firstly, what are the enabling factors for young people to negotiate with their families. Secondly, how young people carve out spaces to fulfill individual desires. And thirdly, the areas of every day decision-making that children lack control over. These include the broad areas of mobility, physical appearance, expression and behavior, association, plans for future, and participation in activities.

Families exercise control over children in the knowledge that what they are doing is good for the child. It is related to protection, good upbringing and prestige of the family. With this approach however, adults have a tendency to see the world from the viewpoint of community rather than the child. Notions about 'culture' are often a justification for imposing restrictions. These limitations affect the development of children and results in them not being able to inform their feelings or problems to people who they trust around them. Alteration in the attitudes of elders in this respect would mean a positive change for children.

It is extremely evident that areas, frequency and intensity of restriction and control vary greatly for girls and boys. For instance, some children say parents do not let them go to school. In the same consultation, there are children from the same community who say parents do allow them. Degrees of control may vary according to age and gender, from family to family and sometimes according to location. Mindset can also vary due to the economic status of a family. This was demonstrated in one of the role-plays where a father would not allow his son to go to school because he believed that only rich people's children went to school.

5.4 Participation in activities

Many children refer to restrictions they face in participating in a number of activities. The first notable and positive point however, is that families have supported the idea of their sons, daughters and grandchildren to take part in these consultations. This is interesting because of its contradiction with many of the activities that children say they normally cannot do. For instance, some children say they are not allowed to participate in activities such as public speaking, singing in front of a crowd, having their photos taken or associating with people they don't know. And yet, children participated in many of these same activities, possibly for the first time, during the consultations. Children also had the new experience of asking for their rights, which at the same time they said they were not allowed to do. It is apparent from this, that children were able to air grievances and feel safe enough to do so in the consultation forums. These spaces became a mechanism for

children to voice complaints concerning the violations of their rights, which is absent in everyday society or families[4].

It is encouraging to note also that boys and girls report experiencing freedom to participate in activities that allow them growth and development. Girls, two years ago, would not have been allowed to go to school, university or complete their education in the way they do now. They are experiencing a newfound freedom, since the Taliban fell.

> ***We are not allowed to participate in ceremonies, dramas***
> Girl 15-18, Herat
>
> ***We are not allowed to be taken pictures of or filmed***
> Girl 15-18
>
> ***We are allowed to watch TV, read books***
> Girl 11-14, Kandahar
>
> ***I am allowed to participate in school competitions***
> Girl 11-14, Kandahar
>
> ***We are allowed to go to school***
> Boy 15-18,Kabul

5.5 Association

Boys and girls explain they are allowed to have friendships with other children and they can visit relatives. They can go to an event that enables them to meet and interact with other people. However, events are limited to those within the family, and restricted to those where relatives are present, such as wedding parties and ceremonies. Both girls and boys said they are not allowed to meet with unknown people. Children are frustrated when freedom to explore relationships with people outside the family, is curbed. These restrictions directly impact on children's ability to build social networks with people outside of close family. The possibility for sustaining other kinds of relationships and enlarging circles of support is limited.

Before the age of 11, girls and boys can play freely with each other. After the onset of puberty, children are suddenly made aware by parents, relatives or siblings that playing with the opposite sex is strictly prohibited. Sometimes even before puberty, girls cannot play with boys unless they are close relatives. In this context, girls and boys explain they can go to friend's houses, as long as the friend is of the same gender.

Such limitations are explained as an issue of personal safety, though it is clear that this also relates to family reputation[5]. The issue of sexuality underlines these restrictions reiterating the idea that men and women function only sexually, and cannot have other

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[4] The committee for the CRC has encouraged state parties to develop 'child friendly' complaints mechanisms to deal with violations of children's rights. This is of particular concern in relation to a child's opportunity to report abuse and other violations taking place within the family.

[5] Some children may not be explained the reasons why they cannot play with a child of the opposite sex

kinds of relationships with each other. It also positions men as sexually uncontrollable and reinforces the message to women and girls that they must 'behave', so as not to rouse male sexuality.

We are allowed to go to wedding parties of our relatives without our mothers
Girl 11-14, Jalalabad
We are allowed to go to a relative's house
Girl 10-12, Badakshan
We are not allowed to play with girls
Boy 11-14, Maslakh camp
We are not allowed to play with people who are not our mahrams
Girl 11-14, Herat

5.6 Personal choices over appearance

Family members quite often control decisions over young people's personal choices. This is particularly true for girls who speak of having limited choice over how they decide to dress. Typically, girls enjoy freedom as young girls and ironically, as they get older and more involved with the idea of their physical appearance, family and society step in to monitor and control it. All girls tend to follow a dress code in public, which is to wear headscarves. Even in all female classrooms, girls must cover their heads. Older girls often have to wear a *burqa* in public, when their bodies start maturing.

In the consultations, only one girl said she could wear what she wants. Most said that they could not choose or buy the clothes they wanted to. Boys on the other hand do not report experiencing similar control over their clothing.

I am not allowed to walk outside without the burqa
Girl 11-14 Jalalabad
I am sad when my mother doesn't let me buy the clothes of my choice
Girl 15-18 Kabul
I am not allowed to cut my hair and to wear make up
Girl 11-14 Herat

5.7 Behavior and speech

Behavior of children is also an area of control, determined by adults, varying from family to family. In front of adults, boys and girls both describe they should be polite, silent, not too boisterous, they should listen to others, be obedient and respectful. Such behaviors reflect having good *'tarbia'* and coming from a family of repute. On the other hand

children are not allowed to laugh or be loud, because it reflects a 'bad' behavior. Often it is male family members that determine peace and quiet in the house.

Boys and girls from many consultations said they are not allowed to:

> **Laugh loudly and make noise, talk about things that does not have any connection to the family ("unnecessary"), talk all the time and do unnecessary jokes, talk if there is no advantage for us, has no relevance to our situation and does not serve any valuable purpose**

The concept of 'unnecessary' here relates to controlling what children talk about. General do's and don'ts appear to be the same for boys and girls. One, children should not ask questions or talk about topics which are considered 'adult'. This could mean almost anything that an adult decides at any given moment. This reflects a universal norm that children should only speak when spoken to, and that adults have a right to give or withhold information from children. It is not considered good for children to spend time talking about things outside the family, because the family should be the focus of children's lives and should be upheld as such.

Adolescent girls describe ways they are not allowed to behave which differs from that of boys. They encounter more pressure from fear of rumor than boys. For example, speaking in front of men and or being seen talking to unknown people reflects badly on them. As a result, in general, girls are more concerned about what others might think of them. Anxiety around their own disposition is centered around whether people are talking 'badly' of them, or perceiving them as 'bad' girls. Fear of what people may say 'behind their backs' is real but not exclusive to these girls.

Boys of the same age group do not face similar preoccupations, but they do experience restriction in terms speaking in front of elders.

The silencing of young people in the family, school and in society is a reality for all children and young people. In contravention of Article 12's obligation 'to hear and take seriously the child's views', girls and boys speak of imposed norms where opportunity for discussion with adults about concerns is severely curbed. In the light of this it is remarkable that children speak so freely in the consultations about things that would normally be considered taboo. For young people to publicly protest about corporal punishment and family violence for example is indeed a brave step given the kind of norms that prevail.

I'm not allowed to talk with someone I don't know
Girl 11-14, Kandahar
I am afraid that somebody talks about me behind my back
Girl 15-18, Surkh Rood
I am afraid that people will talk about me and believe that I am a bad person
Girl 15-18, Surkh Rood
We are not allowed to talk in front of elders
Boy 15-18, Jalalabad
We are not allowed to laugh in front of adults
Boys 8-14, Maslakh Camp
I am not allowed to talk in front of elders or to ask about our rights
Boy 15-18, Jalalabad

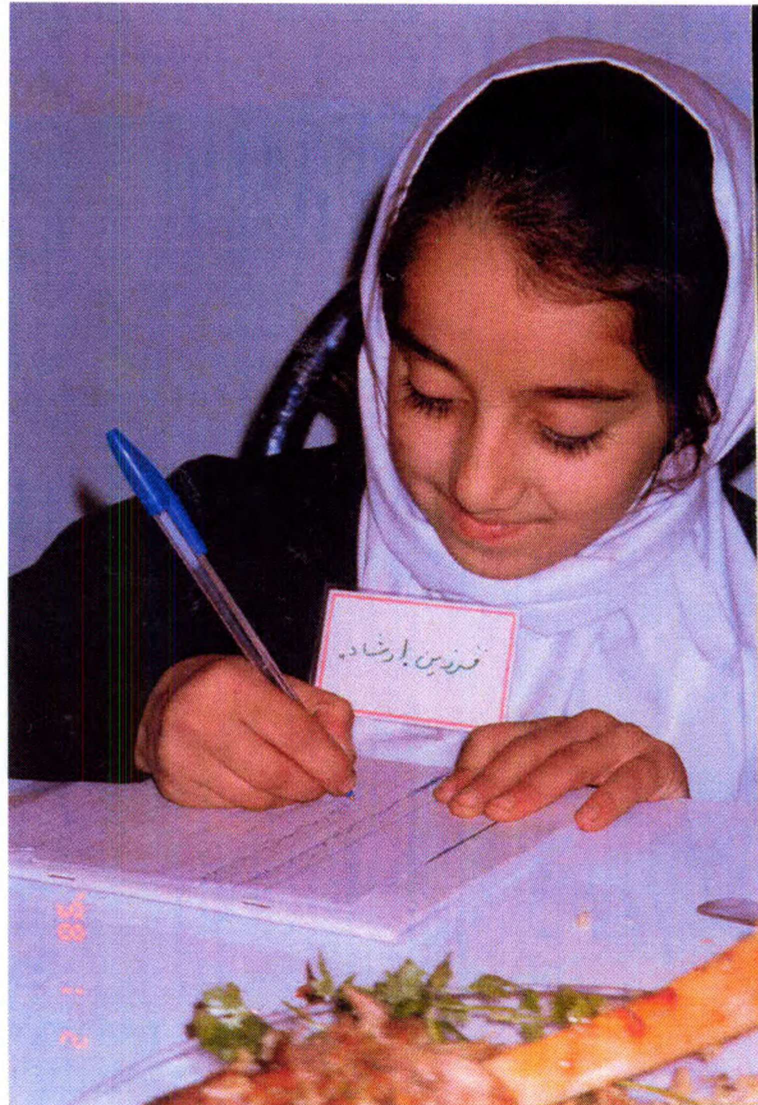
5.8 Mobility

Children experience different degrees of mobility, according to their age and gender. Some girls report they are allowed to go out if accompanied, but for the most part, their freedom to move around in public is highly restricted. They often have to stay at home while their brothers are given more freedom to go out. Mobility constraints for females carry on into adulthood. Monitoring mobility is again from the point of morality.The upshot of this is the inhibition of intellectual and social development for girls. In contrast, boys are generally allowed to move out after seeking permission of their parents. They do not always need accompaniment.

Girls are not allowed to go outside the yard
Girl 11-14, Jalalabad
I am not allowed to be independent
Girl 15-18, Jalalabad
I am not allowed to go to the parks or to go to the city
Girl 11-14, Jalalabad
I am allowed to walk around my house
Girl Kandahar, 11-14
We are not allowed to go to the cinema without permission
Girl 12-14, Badakshan
We are not allowed to go to the city without our parent's permission
Boy 15-18, Surkh Rood

5.9 Decision making over future plans

Many boys and girls are in search of a future of their own making. As they get older, they express a desire for independence and more decision making power. This conflicts with



Knowledge and Learning

the considered duty of parents to decide the future of their children, including who and when they marry.

Girls as young as 11 protest against the idea of being forced into early marriage. The underlying principle they argue is that it prevents them from completing their education. They do not speak of the many other far-reaching consequences early and forced marriage can have for girls. Motherhood at an early age entails many health complications and a high risk of maternal death. Other children in the family experience anxiety around this too. Because marriage is parents' duty to arrange, young people find they cannot easily question this. Girls have limited negotiating power. Boys are not pressured to marry early as much as the girls but are uncomfortable with having no control over to choose their partners.

We wish to continue studying a subject that we want, to decide future life, to be independent, to study what we choose ourselves

Girl 15-18, Jalalabad

We are not allowed to live an independent life

Boy 15-18, Kandahar

I will be sad if my father marries my sister with someone without her consent

Child in Kandahar

We are not allowed to decide about our marriage

Boy 15-18, Kabul

Girls are not allowed to decide about their marriage

Girl 15-18, Surkh Rood

I am not allowed to marry someone I like

Girl 11-14, Kandahar

The issue of forced marriage was the topic of several presentations and role-plays by girls and boys in closing sessions. In one story, a girl was forced to marry an old man in London with lots of money, one leg and washing dogs for an occupation. The parents said it was a big opportunity for the girl, since she was going abroad and would have a good life and the family needed the money. The girl was crying, saying she had not even seen this man, he was as old as a grand father and she did not want to marry him. The family said she should be happy to get this opportunity. Nobody listened to the girl. The mother asked her to go out of the room while they discussed. "It is not your business" she said, the elders would decide for her.

The struggle for self hood amongst young people must be seen against a backdrop of forces, such as gender, family, religion and the adult exercise of coercive power. In spite of this, young people show remarkable bravery and outspokenness in the consultations on issues of marriage. They demonstrate a strong will and vision for changing such cultural practices.

6. Knowledge and learning

The right to and meaning of education is embodied in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Article 28 & 29). It stresses that education must be made available to everybody, and that elementary schooling must be free. Article 29 emphasizes that the aim of education is to provide the child with life skills. It also encapsulates the need to strengthen children's capacity to enjoy a full range of human rights and to promote a culture, which is infused by appropriate human rights values. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) also provides that education shall be directed to strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Education signifies many things for children in Afghanistan, including, as we shall see, the same values embodied in the above. Most importantly for children, education means;

- Learning opportunities
- Stability and routine
- Progress
- Peace
- Normality

Having such conditions however is subject to economic improvement and enduring stability in a country[6]. This fact is shared by children in the consultations, for whom going to school has been coupled with an end to wartime. Experience and logic tell children that violence is a futile strategy to resolve conflict and that education is the way forward. Children express that continuing peace is an essential component for being able to access education;

Children today are faced with a shattered education system. Twenty years of armed conflict has resulted in the destruction and damage of, reportedly, three quarters of the schools across the country. While rockets were dropping, schools were closed and parents were fearful to let their children outside. Years passed where there were no children in the schools. Many teachers were killed, subscripted into the army, left the country or the profession, leaving a huge gap in the professional supply of educators. All but two of the nation's regional training centers for teachers were destroyed in the civil war. The Taliban ban on female education also took its toll[7]. The end of this era has marked a renewed eagerness for girls to be included in education.

Millions of young people who lost out during the war years are now returning to school in huge numbers. Within the last two years, the number of children enrolled in schools has tripled to almost three million. Older children are often beginning at grade levels that are usually for much younger children. Now that peace has been somewhat restored, families want their sons and daughters to be educated. The popularity of sending children to school can be explained by the tremendous loss of education experienced by parents.

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[6] Article 26 UDHR recognizes that education shall further the activities for the maintenance of peace.

[7] This is noticeable in the extremely low literacy rate of women in Afghanistan. It is very difficult to give exact numbers, but maybe as few as 2-5 % of the female population is literate as opposed to between 5-10% of the males.

The destruction of education networks represents a huge development set back for Afghanistan. Lost education and skills of a nation, will take years to replace, making post war recovery all the more difficult. Consequently, many people, including children, see developing education as the answer to getting their broken country back on its feet;

Education has a crucial rehabilitative role to play in fulfilling the needs of children in conflict and post conflict situations. It gives shape and structure to children's lives. Especially vital for children, it replaces confusion and disorder with normality and routine. One of the main worries of girls and boys returning from refugee situations is the fear of not being able to continue their education once they return;

Apart from giving young people a sense of purpose in their daily schedule, school signifies an important source of stimulation outside of the family. This opens up the possibility to establish reference points with other people and their ideas - essential in terms of developing social capital. Places of learning like extra curricula courses are extremely popular amongst children, not the least because of the great number of uneducated teachers, often commented on by the children in the consultations. Young people in employment also seek additional courses in math's, computers and English. Courses are outside of normal schooling hours, so children have to seek permission from their parents to attend. For girls, educational institutions are one of the few socially legitimated public spaces they can occupy outside of the home. Often they are not allowed to attend courses because they are co-educational. Girls are incredibly determined to have courses made available to them[8].

We have a great desire to go to school
Boy 11-14, Surkh Rood

Going to school makes me happy
Numerous children of every age in every consultation

We need peace and security; without these two, we cannot go to school
Child in the closing session, Warduj.

We should have pens instead of guns
Boy 11-14, Mazar

It makes me happy that the Taliban was thrown out
Girl in Mazar

When I graduate my family will be happy
Girl 11-14, Mazar

I dream that the education system changes according to the new development
Girl 15-18, Herat

[8] After the consultations in Mazar I Shareef, one of the significant outcomes of child-to-child groups is that girls successfully negotiated with their parents on the issue going to courses that are co-ed. Apart from accessing further studies, girls also report that being in class with boys is also a learning experience for them.

I would be happy to have winter courses for students, especially returnees

Girl 15-18, Kabul

We want English courses

Girl 11-14, Kandahar

6.1 Significance of knowledge and learning in the lives of children

It is apparent that girls and boys recognize that gaining knowledge through learning has several implications for them. Firstly, they connect acquiring knowledge to having the means to solve problems. From their standpoint, the ability to solve problems leads to the overall improvement of life conditions. This echoes sentiments in Article 29 (CRC), which states that education goes beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences that enable children to develop their personalities to live a fully satisfying life.

Children, for instance, believe that if a person is without knowledge, he or she can be easily fooled. Obstacles loom larger and seem impenetrable. This idea was illustrated in a role-play performed by a group of boys in the Jalalabad final session. They presented a scene in which a father could not read and write which resulted in him being cheated by another man. The son arrives and after realizing what has happened suggests that his father take a literacy course.

In addition young people seem to fear the idea of being illiterate. One reason behind this could be that being 'uneducated' means being a constant victim to ones problems;

I feel happy when the educated teachers come to our class and solve our problems

Boy 15-18, Herat

I like to solve economical problems, I like education

Girl 11-14, Surkh Rood

I'm afraid of being uneducated

Boy 15-18, Surkh Rood

I am sad when I see uneducated people, because they are like disabled and blind people

Boy 11-14, Mazar

6.2 Knowledge is Power

Education gives children great hope in a world that constantly locates them as powerless. Young people are keenly aware that learning means having the ability to question what is already known with new information, arguments, and perspectives. Acquiring knowledge

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therefore implies movement, which can lead to empowerment[9]. Many children seem to be saying that education is the key to having the potential to make changes.

The goal of education according to CRC is "to empower the child by developing his/her skills, capacity, human dignity, self esteem and self-confidence". These words echo the incredible effect that education seems to be having on girls and boys envisioning themselves as highly qualified professionals in the future. For example, despite limited access to resources, also girls living in remote villages are bold and confident to imagine themselves as doctors and engineers.

I want to be a lawyer, due to that I'm studying hard
Girl 11-14,Mazar

Without knowledge, life is so difficult
Boy11-14 ,Surkh Rood

Learning makes our future brighter. We have to learn
Girl 15-18, Mazar

I wish girls could be doctors and engineers
Girl, Surk Rood

6.3 Children's experiences of learning

Children speak of learning as something that can take place in a variety of locations, as well as in school[10]. They demonstrate a craving for stimulation through listening to others or being exposed to new perspectives and ideas;

Visual media and communication presents many possibilities for children to learn about the world and local events. Children complain of not having access to Internet, radio and television. They argue that television is biased in the way it is made, and it is exclusive because it doesn't reflect their reality;

Meeting intelligent people makes me happy
Child 8-10, Mazar

I wish I could listen to the world news
Child 8-10, Kandahar

Internet makes me happy
Child 8-10, Bamyan

They are not using children in the TV program
Boy 11-14,Kabul

They are showing TV programs that nobody can understand
Boy 11-14, Mazar

[9] Children in child-to-child groups have shown that knowledge about child rights, can transform into a working currency of power to change problematic situations.
[10] Article 29 states that education should also take place in the family and community as well as in school

6.4 Barriers to education and learning

After so many years of disruption, children need to have enabling conditions for learning. However children cite many obstacles, which prevent them from accessing education and engaging in effective learning processes. It is worrying in terms of how much longer children can continue under these limitations and if there will be an increase in drop out.

6.4.1 Security

For many girls and boys, the physical act of going to school, is still impractical. With an unstable political situation and a high presence of gunmen and military occupying public spaces, girls and boys are vulnerable. Schools are fewer in rural areas and often children have to walk to neighboring villages, as there is no transportation. Threat of violence deters many parents for sending their children to school.

> ***School is far away, we have to walk from the village to where the school is***
> Child 8-10,Surkh Rood
>
> ***When we are going to school and seeing commanders on the way I feel afraid***
> Girl 11-14 ,alalabad

6.4.2 Economic

Poverty is a major constraint for many families who simply cannot afford to buy materials, clothes, books and pay for transport to send their children to school. Sons are often income generators for the family often seeing to immediate needs of survival.

> ***We do not have money to go to school***
> Boy 11-14, Kabul

6.4.3 Infrastructure

While a large number of schools have reopened, schools in far-flung areas still have not been rebuilt. Many school buildings still standing in semi ruins and are unsafe for children. A large number of children in the consultations have no access to schools.

When children do go to school, their classes are often held in canvas tents. In high summer, the hot temperatures make these extremely uncomfortable conditions to sit in, and concentrate on studying. In winter there is snow and rain. Some children do not even have a tent.

I'm interested to go to school but there is no school building
Girl 11-14, Herat
I wish we could have a building for our school because we are suffering from the rain
Child 8-10, Surkh Rood

6.4.4 Education Equipment

Basic requirements like desks, chairs and notebooks are lacking and it is not unusual to find children in schools studying with books on their laps. Facilities to assist children's learning like laboratories and libraries are also deficient.

It makes me happy to have desks and chairs in the school
Boy 11-14, Mazar
To have laboratories in my school would make me happy
Boy, Mazar

6.4.5 Overcrowding in schools

Infrastructural limitations also make it hard for teachers to teach effectively. Schools are overcrowded, sometimes with a child/teacher ratio of 60:1[11]. Because of the sheer numbers, teaching time in organized in batches. This means children only get about 3 hours of learning time per day. At home too, cramped living conditions and no light make it hard for children to do homework, read or study;

We are 60 children in one class, it is difficult to learn something, and there should be a wall to divide us in two
Child, Mazar

6.4.6 Teachers

Children have raised several issues concerning teachers. Due to the political situation, teachers in government schools often do not get paid[12]. This causes lack of incentive and teachers become despondent about their work. This has major ramifications for keeping teachers in schools. Children report that a teacher often arrives late for class and are not attentive while giving the lessons. Regardless of this, children are extremely compassionate towards their teachers;

[11] This information was learnt in discussion with children in Mazar-I-sharif

[12] Sex segregation in schools makes teaching one of the few professions where women are significantly visible. On average a teacher gets paid around 2000 Afghanis per month ($40) (source: Teacher in Mazar I Sharif).

Like children, teachers find it difficult to get to school if there is no bus or vehicle to take them there. This presents a security threat for women.

Teaching is largely based on outdated pedagogical methods and materials and there is no standard curriculum. There are very few educated teachers and the teaching force is under tremendous strain after a massive influx of children into the schools.

Children in the consultations value learning that is interactive and interesting. Unfortunately, this is not the norm in the classroom. Children are made to listen to teachers and learn by information repetition. Invariably, teaching methodology does not encourage children to have discussions, ask questions or debate. Learning through participation methodology is unfamiliar terrain for teachers.[13]

Most teachers are in need of training programs that would facilitate their transition in to the classroom. Girls in Badakshan are losing heart in going to school because they make huge efforts to get there and are disappointed when it is such poor quality.

A recurring theme is behavior and attitudes of teachers. Children perceive teachers as militant, strict and uncaring in the way they relate in the classroom[14]. They are extremely grateful when a teacher behaves differently. Corporal punishment is condoned as an acceptable form of 'disciplining' children in school[15].

I thank for the kindness of our teachers, because they are working without salary

Girl in Herat

Teachers are sometimes not coming to class

Child in Warduj

Having transport for teachers to go and teach children there would make me happy

Girl 15-18, Herat

We need trained teachers

Boy 11-14, Kabul

The teachers don't know how to teach us

Boy 11-14,Kabul

I am afraid of my teacher's anger

Boy 11-14, Kandahar

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13 Article 29(1) insists upon the need for education to be child centered, child friendly and empowering, and that " the key goal of education is the development of the individual child's personality, talents and abilities". The thought behind this is that every child has his or her own unique abilities and learning needs.

14 This was observed in many role-plays on corporal punishment performed by children in closing sessions

15 see chapter on children, peace and their experiences of violence



Peace and experience of violence

6.4.6 Discrimination

Girls and boys identify school as a location where a lot of discrimination can take place. Disabled and poor children are denied access to mainstream or quality schools. Able-bodied children tease disabled children in the playgrounds. Poor children describe prejudice and bias operating amongst teachers. They say that those from rich families receive more attention and there is suggestion that teachers can be bribed. Children also say that teachers beat the children who are not their 'favorites'.

There are many issues that limit girls from participating in education. Families resist sending girls to school. Older girls in the Surkh Rood closing session performed a role-play illustrating how families believe there is no point in investing in education for girls, because they will ultimately go to their husband's house after marriage[16]. In this way, culture is often used as an excuse for not sending girls to school. Parents are afraid of rumors if they start sending their daughters to school in an environment where this is not the norm. Girls complain family members do not let them go to school but lack the negotiating power to challenge such issues[17].

Conditions must be especially conducive in order for girls to go to school. They need separate schools and the school must have a wall around it otherwise securing privacy for girls is difficult.

Girls express worry over early marriage often because it means their schooling will be stopped. Husbands and family members are usually eager that the girl should stay at home, which again leaves girls no space for negotiation.

Sometimes the teachers only give attention to the rich people, not the poor people

Girl in Warduj

Some Pashtun families say "I am either a Pashtun, or I send my daughter to schooll

Child in Madakh refugee camp

I am happy if they build a wall around our school

Girl 8-10, Mazar

There should be special schools for girls who have married early

Girl 15-18, Herat

[16] It is cultural practice in Afghanistan that after marriage a wife goes to live in her husband's house

[17] A positive outcome for GMC groups in Dehdadi district, (Mazar), was the identification of gender discrimination for girls. One boy spoke of realizing how wrong he was in previously stopping his sister from going to school. He now feels she has the same rights to go to school as he does.

7. Peace and experiences of violence

7.1 Children's perceptions of war and violence

One of the most important and difficult tasks when conflict breaks out is finding ways to protect children. War creates a multitude of situations wherein women and children are persecuted and deprived of their fundamental freedoms and rights. Humanitarian law, though often disregarded in war, gives a basis for action, to work towards providing this protection. In this regard, Article 38 of the CRC, provides that state parties are "to take

Prevalence and acknowledgement of deliberate violence against children in schools and in the home has brought about action and policy on the issue of child protection all over the world. Article 19 of CRC aims to guarantee children's protection from "all forms of physical or mental violence" while in the care of parents or others.

Unfortunately, such protection is a far cry for children growing up in Afghanistan. Family, the usual source of protection, has often been unable to provide children with necessary shielding from abuse, leaving children exposed and vulnerable. The degree of violence, its effects, and attitudes towards violence, either as a strategy or value, are extensively taken up by children in the consultations. Many young people have grown up knowing only war and the insecurity it brings. Foremost in their minds is the violation and damage caused by war. For many, peace exists in other places, but not in their own nation.

Children from across the country reflect experiences of violence when they talk about what makes them feel sad and afraid. The loss of family members is the most devastating aspect of war to children. Death of fathers adds to trauma by its impact on family livelihood and security of females. War stands for death or injury of family members, friends, relatives, and neighbours. In many parts of the country, children have witnessed loved ones murdered in front of them. In the Bamiyan consultations, Hazara children spoke extensively about the killings of family members. 70% had lost brothers, fathers, uncles and other relatives.

Children, in some cases, including very young children, have also suffered severe brutality in the hostilities.

Statements reveal that girls and boys have been exposed to unimaginable violent acts and atrocities. It is of great concern that many have witnessed or been forced to watch terrible acts of torture and execution in their communities;

Apart from bearing the loss of relatives and basic protection by the family, for children, war has meant losing shelter, familiar sites and the disruption of normality. Heavy bombardments have literally turned ordinary homes, schools and streets into dust and rubble. Young people along with their families have been forced to take refuge in unsafe housing, or by fleeing the country. During interim periods of peace, children have had to stay indoors, stunting both national growth and personal development. Almost all

infrastructures have been destroyed, making rebuilding a lengthy and expensive task. People are struggling with consequential and widespread conditions of extreme poverty arising out of this. In addition, valuable relics of the past have been destroyed which has erased important historical and cultural reference points.[1]

Children are equally vulnerable in the aftermath of war especially due to the thousands of mines, which lie unexploded, and contamination of the environment. This curbs their freedom to play. Destructive elements in society like looters and local commanders who demand money from their families also cause children to worry.

Incidents of warlike situations and the fear surrounding them are still fresh in children's memory[1]. Some explain they have become highly sensitive to loud sounds and noises. Their subconscious connects normal sounds to the noise of rockets and bombings. As if located in their bodies, it brings back memories of terror. While these consultations were being held, the United States attack on Iraq was imminent. This explains a resurfacing fear amongst children about the US military.

In other countries, children are safe, we must not be silent
Girl 11-14, Mazar

I'm afraid my father will be killed
Child 8-10, Mazar

Being beaten by Taliban makes me afraid
Boy 11-14, Herat

Hands and feet should not be cut off due to war
Child 8-10, Mazar

To see dead people makes me sad
Boy 11-14,Kandahar

When the fighters are destroying our gardens, markets and hospitals it makes us sad
Boy 15-18, Surk Rood

Herat is an historical place and I do not want to see the Taliban come and destroy it like they have done in other places
Boy in Herat

We are afraid of beating, thieves during the night, being in a smoky and dirty environment
Girl 11-14, Surkh Rood

When someone is killed by mines I feel sad
Boys in Kabul

I am afraid of the war between Iraq and America, that it will involve our country
Girl 11-14, Surkh Rood

High sounds of the TV make me afraid
Girl 15-18, Kabul
I'm afraid of bombing from US air-planes
Boy 8-10, Surkh Rood

A weariness of war and a longing for laughter, love and warmth is unmistakable in songs and slogans performed by children in closing sessions;

We are tired of war,
our mothers are tired,
they have lost their sons,
we do not want guns,
we do not want to be handcuffed,
we want education,
we do not want fall and the coldness of winter,
we need to laugh,
we need the heat of spring"

Lyrics of a song by girls in the Argu closing session

7.2 Children's values and notions of peace

Living through violent times only seems to have strengthened girls and boys' aspirations for peace. Though the notion of peace may be unfamiliar, it is a non-negotiable value, which they declare unanimously in their many statements;

It strikes that when children talk about peace, they have little or no language with which to describe it. By and large, 'peace' is an abstract notion, which children seem unable to picture or illustrate with words. It is as if children do not know what it looks like. A few children describe flowers, green cities and flowing rivers, as symbolising a peaceful environment. More often peace is spoken about as an absence of horror or violence;

Pain and anger at the past and images of heroes and martyrs can easily glorify war and influence young people's minds, especially boys, into upholding the values of violence. It is interesting that experiences of violence have not led children towards harbouring revengeful feelings. This could be partly because children in the consultations were not encouraged to revisit negative incidents in their lives, and the atmosphere created in the consultations was affirming and positive for them. It could also be that experiences of pain, have led them to understand that resolution cannot be resolved through violence. Children's condemnation of violence is a prominent theme. They urge for norms of violence and force to be replaced by peaceful and caring ways of resolving conflict.

The idea of peace however is still distant in children's minds. This is not surprising because they see the same people who were in positions of power during wartime, controlling their localities today. While peace is not in control of ordinary people,

children remain fearful of resurging violence in the future. The only hope they have is that the government will do something. Children believe that getting rid of gunmen who hold the power is one of the strategies for obtaining peace.

The prevailing gun culture is testament to these beliefs. Due to the persisting terror and lawlessness under which they continue to live, children have an utter dread of violent behaviors. Armed combat between militia groups still rages in some areas. Everyday acts of brutality and crime are perpetrated or condoned by warlords. Children relate countless images of violence that continue to disturb and threaten them.

Boys and girls believe that reaching a peaceful situation in their country is essential, before the country can begin developing. They need peace to get an education, and to be able to play like other children;

Peace and playing makes me happy
Child 11-14, Mazar

Peace makes me happy
Many children

I am happy to see some flowers
Boy 11-14, Surkh Rood

When the teacher does not beat me I am happy
Child 8-10, Mazar

am sad when somebody uses violence on me
Child in Mazar

I don't like it when people use force
Child in Mazar

We want to have all the weapons collected
Child 8-10, Jalalabad

It makes us happy if warlords are removed from our country and peace replaces war
Girl 11-14, Kabul

I'm afraid of those people with guns on their shoulders and are walking in the city
Child in Jalalabad

I'm afraid of cars with black windows
Child 11-14, Jalalabad

I'm afraid of dangerous people
Girl 15-18, Kabul

When I think war has really finished I will feel happy
Boy 11-14, Herat

7.3 Sexual violence by armed forces

Children affected by armed conflict are also vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. It is common knowledge amongst local people that girls and boys are at great risk of sexual violence from warlords and commanders. Reports of involvement of security forces and militia in the disappearances of children are of serious concern to communities and families. This is one of the justifications given for the wearing of *burqa* by young girls.

> ***We see armed people on the way to school and it makes us afraid***
>
> Girl 14, Argu closing session
>
> ***In our village there are armed people, and we know girls who cannot go to school because of gunmen***
>
> Girls in Warduj closing session Badakshan

7.4 Children's experiences of domestic violence

Children experience a different kind of hurt when their families are violent towards them. The expectation is that the home is a place of protection and when children feel violated it also damages their ability to trust. Often, children themselves can think of it as normal to be slapped, kicked or hit by adults or older siblings. This kind of violence is relentless, regular and very often overlooked. Domestic violence is surprisingly out in the open and children willingly share their thoughts and feelings about it.

Boys and girls face physical punishment at home usually because they have behaved 'badly' or made a mistake at school or in performing their duties or tasks.

Violence experienced at home can also happen when young people challenge norms of tradition and culture. Poverty frequently results in families holding on to social and cultural beliefs which young people find oppressive. Such conflicting ideas often lead to violence. With the rapid changing youth culture today, it is all the more important to include adults in discussions around children and young people's rights.

1. Introduction

The first "We are the Future of Afghanistan" consultation was held in October 2002 and the last in November 2003. More than 800 children and young people have participated in the discussions and exercises. This report is based on the material from Mazar-I-Sherif, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Surkh Rood, Badakshan and Bamyan and on material from the consultation with refugee children in Peshawar. The Gardez, Sar-e-Pul and Shiberghan consultations were not yet held when this report was written.

Our main goal for the project was to acknowledge and promote the rights of Afghan children and young people, especially their rights to express opinions in matters concerning their own lives. We wanted to show the politicians, parents, teachers and the international community that people under 18 have resources, talents and ambitions that are needed in the reconstruction of this country. They are half the population and can make a huge difference if their right to participate is recognized.

The participants were between 8 and 18 years old. They had different backgrounds, came from villages and cities, some of them were disabled. We had children from normal schools and non-formal schools and some were working children who did not go to school at all. Most ethnic groups were represented. Half of the participants were girls.

The quotes here come from the group work when the children and young people discussed what made them happy, sad and afraid, what they were or were not allowed to do and what their real day and dream day was like. Some of the messages are taken from the event at the end of the program when we invited representatives of the local authorities, teachers and parents to listen to the children and young people (called the "closing session").

UNICEF has funded the consultation project under the wings of the Global Movement for Children (GMC). Plans and development have been discussed in the GMC Kabul Working Group. Around the country, many organizations and representatives of local authorities have been cooperating to arrange the consultations and support the follow-up projects started up afterwards. Save the Children Sweden has been in charge of the implementation of the project, with contributions from Save the Children Norway.

Cath Sluggett, a consultant, analyzed the collected material during a three months consultancy in the summer 2003.

A role-play by boys in Warduj highlights this point.

A son, mother and father are talking. The boy wants to go to school but the mother says: " Who will bring wood and water, who will bring food to your father in the field?"

The boy continues by saying he wants to study and be a doctor or an engineer.
"Shut up, be quiet, I will tell your father to beat you" the mother says. The father enters and says " Nobody from our family is going to school, so how can you go?" "The other children are going to school", the boy said. "The school is for the rich people, you should work with me to earn money to feed my children, there is no school for poor people." the father replies. The boy cries. The father beats him.

Violence against children in the family is so easily accepted because it is linked to the question of property. Adults consider children their property and therefore do not think beating or humiliating their child is ethically or morally wrong. Corporal punishment is also widely accepted as the right way of teaching children how to behave. They are unaware that it has a negative effect on their children. Moreover, these are the norms and values that children grow up with and are susceptible to internalizing if left unchallenged.

Boys and girls are questioning the whole area of violent behavior in the family as unacceptable. However, their powerlessness to alter situations or protect themselves means they are not in a position to easily challenge it. It is positive that they are at least talking about it;

It makes me angry when my parents are beating us
Boy 11-1,4 Kabul

I'm afraid if I fail in my exams my father will beat me
Child in Kandahar

I am afraid when my mother hits me
Child 8-10, Herat

I am afraid of my brother beating me
Girl 11-14, Kandahar

I wish for a peaceful situation in the home and also in the country
Girl15-18, Herat

Good behavior of parents in the family makes me happy
Girl 15-18, Kabul

7.5 Children's views on corporal punishment

Children experience violations at school too, where teachers commonly practice corporal punishment. Children have a right to protection from corporal punishment under CRC (Article 19). According to a study by Save the Children Sweden, approximately 47% of children interviewed in two schools in Kabul reported experiencing physical punishment from teachers. [1] Girls and boys in the consultations further corroborate the prevalence of corporal punishment in the classroom and feel hurt and angry about it.

Children are more vocal about challenging violence in their schools, than at home. They also feel more able to strategize ways to eliminate corporal punishment by regularly talking to their teachers and headmasters and finding ways to monitor the use of violence in schools[1].

In one girl's school in Mazar, the girls discussed that corporal punishment was one of the biggest problems they faced. They talked about how to solve the problem. They went to the principal of the school and explained the problem. He was surprised to hear what the children had to say and thought it was very important. All the teachers were called together and talked about the effects of corporal punishment. They were told to find alternative ways of keeping order in their classes.

Physically punishing a child is carried out under the umbrella of disciplining. The idea that school should be a place for disciplining children fits into a broader picture of how the education system views children in general. That is to say, children are viewed and treated as passive recipients of knowledge rather than as engaging participants of learning.

Disciplining moreover is generally believed to be a necessary part of a child's 'training'. Adults often believe that the child will learn more if they are beaten. Some children also incorporate the same belief. [1] Again, teachers are unaware of the downside of hitting children. Importance placed on the child's development of good '*tarbia*' explains why most parents don't challenge teachers on corporal punishment.Girls and boys have limited decision-making power and strong internalized values of respecting elders. Given this, conflicts can emerge which can lead to adults behaving abusively towards them. Bad behavior is constituted as not doing homework, being late, not paying attention to elders, breaking something or playing. Children often find there is no reason behind why the teacher is beating them. One speculation for this is that teachers discriminate children from poorer families by beating them.

Apart from physical punishment, children speak in terms of how teachers humiliate and do not respect them. Article 19 of CRC has been interpreted to mean to respect the inherent dignity of the child to express his or her views freely in school according to Article 12(1). Children however report teachers not listening to them, failing to answer their questions, 'shutting them up' and using harsh language towards them. Such lack of caring engagement in the classroom makes children afraid of their teachers.



Participation and discrimination

Children have raised objection to the issue of corporal punishment in schools. They say that they cannot study properly if they fear going to school, they feel humiliated, hurt and scared of their teachers[1].

Despite this, children report that going to school makes them feel happy and corporal punishment seems not to deter them from going for classes. Boys and girls show remarkable forgiveness, patience and confidence in teachers. It is important for them to have teachers who are loving and caring in their approach.

I am sad when my teacher beats me in the class
Child 8-10, Kandahar

Being beaten without reason by the teacher makes me unhappy
Boy 15-18 Herat

Beating and discrimination in schools makes me sad
Boy 15-18 Herat

I am afraid of the cruel teachers
Boys 11-14, Herat

I'm afraid of my teacher's anger
Child 8-10, Kandahar

When I see my history teacher, it makes me happy
Child 8-10 Mazar

I would like our teachers to be kind and hardworking because this is a world of science and technology
Boy 11-14 Surkh Rood

7.6 Effects of violence on children

It is unclear how children are psychologically and emotionally affected by exposure to different forms of violence. This area was not focused on in the discussions held with children in the consultations. Some studies[1] however report that familial support and nurturing, cultural and belief in God have equipped Afghan children with a kind of resiliency that has not been seen in other war affected countries. The framework of family, religion and cultural moorings such as *'tarbia'* are believed to have enabled children to overcome the considerable tragedy resulting from war.

The consultations corroborate that boys and girls demonstrate remarkable optimism and joy for life, despite the consequences of having gone though tremendous difficulty. It appears that war has not taken away their ability to laugh, to love and have compassion for others.

We should love other people
Girl 15-18, Mazar

It is my dream that we should all be free of sadness
Girl 15-18 Herat

8. Participation and discrimination

8.1 Children as partners in reconstruction

Poverty and lack of skilled workforce make it difficult to speed up the restoration of buildings and facilities, so that people's daily routine can be normalized. Most people deal with a whole host of everyday problems like crumbling and unsafe buildings and lack of basic necessities like water and means of livelihood.

Children have a strong desire to influence decision making so that changes to this widespread situation can be achieved. The degree of damage caused by acts of war to infrastructure, institutions, homes and factories, acts as a constant reminder to them of the need for improvement.

Beyond the suffering of dislocation and preoccupation with essential survival, children and young people in Afghanistan have an impressive desire to connect with others and actively engage in society. From cities to villages in Badakshan, girls and boys have shown great eagerness to participate, and be included in processes, decisions and actions to develop and reconstruct the devastated nation to which they belong. As children, they feel able to contribute and they have needs and ideas that are both different and the same as adults.

Girls show remarkable boldness and determination to make adults listen to them and realize that they too have valuable capabilities that can be utilized in the reconstruction of the country. In closing sessions, they have spoken to local decision makers about concerns and their need to be recognized in their own capacity as young people.

Children's desire for participation in reconstruction comes from a sense of optimism that peace and security for everybody in the country will be sustained. The construction of roads, new buildings, schools and the reopening of colleges and training centers become symbols of hope and instill confidence that things are only going to get better.

In an imagined and not too distant future, boys and girls perceive themselves as the labor force that will further stabilize the country's economic, political and social development. Their future dreams are closely linked to the idea of reconstruction and the development of resources. In practical terms they are clear of what they need to do, in terms of participation in nation building.

Even though girls face many social restrictions in society, they are equally ambitious to take part in reconstruction and putting together a fully functional society.

Thinking about your life doesn't depend on your age - it depends on your mind

Girl 15-18, Herat

More factories in our country would make me happy

Child 8-10 Kandahar

Water and electricity in our country make me happy

Children, 8-10, Jalalabad

Although we are children, we are called in the Holy Quran the best creations of God. We can serve our community and our nation even if we are small. Just give us the chance

A girl in the village of Argu, Badakshan

We are village girls, but at least we can take part in the reconstruction of our village

Girls in Argu.

Children should be counted as active members of the community especially in the reconstruction of Afghanistan

Girl in Kabul

I would like Afghanistan to be like New York

Boy from Surkh Rood

I wish I could learn computer programming because our country during the 23 years of war, is underdeveloped and needs to know new technology

Boy11-14 Kabul

I want to be an engineer and reconstruct my country

Girl 11-14 Herat

I want to be a journalist to tell the truths of my nation to the world

Girl 11-14 Mazar

8.2 Children's participation in family and society

Why do children want to participate?

Participation basically means children thinking for themselves, expressing their views and interacting positively with others. It means children should be involved in decisions which affect their lives, the lives of their community and society at large.

Girls and boys in the consultations reflect a strong need for this kind of participation. They want to be listened to by those around and viewed differently to how they are typically considered. They celebrate the experience of being asked their opinions. It gives them a sense of belonging, importance and value.

Children also link participation to protection. They value being included in family discussion because it endows them with the ability to protect themselves and other children from harm.

Children want participation in the family, they want to belong as individuals, rather than be considered a belonging of the family. Girls are especially anxious that they are not excluded from fundamental decision making about their futures in the area of early or forced marriage. It has ramifications for them in terms of health and personal development. It is a cultural norm not to consult sons and daughters on this and therefore difficult for young people to question elders.

Children also seek participation at a community level because they want to be recognized and heard. They complain of rarely seeing an image of themselves reflected in media. Television programs hold no purpose or entertainment for them.

> ***The protection of children must start in the family. Adults should not say 'these questions are not for your age'- because today's children are the adults of the future***
>
> Girl 15-18 Surkh Rood closing session.
>
> ***I am happy when my parents talk with me***
>
> ***I am happy when my parents give me good advice***
>
> Girl 15-18
>
> ***I am afraid of marriage by force and saddened by the fact that I have no right to participate in family issues***
>
> Girl 15-18
>
> ***There is no entertainments for children and they are not using children in the programs***
>
> Boy11-14 Kabul

8.3 Right and barriers to participation

Inevitably there are imbalances of power between adults and children. Speaking out for example to raise uncomfortable issues like abuse or critiquing the government is something that children are aware that they cannot do. Being involved in decision making seems a far off dream to most boys and girls. Children are endowed with the right to participate in society according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12, assures that they have the right to express views freely in all areas affecting them.[1]

Children's statements reveal that the right to 'take part' is often not given to them. The information and insights that children have about their own lives is often overlooked. Children usually find that they are not able to participate on their own terms and in

reaching their dreams to be fully included, they face many cultural and social barriers. These barriers broadly fall into several areas including:

Children are thought of as not capable
Children are not heard and not always supplied with information
Children rely on adult support to help them participate
Children are vulnerable to discrimination.

War has contributed towards a heightened sense of anxiety felt by families towards their children's protection. Parents have had the difficult task of shielding children from violence and trauma surrounding the war. Often they have not been able to protect their children from terrible violations. Increased protectiveness often results in a shrinking of space for children to be involved in family dialogue. While adult intention may be to protect children by withholding information or minimizing space for discussion, children have found this has the effect of making them feel more afraid and more vulnerable. Children's right to freedom of expression, (article 13), stipulates that this right includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information.

Girls and boys place high value on being able to ask parents and relatives for advice. They look to their families for guidance. To those whose family members have died, the loss of this source of guidance is severely felt. Children wish to have more dialogue with their families because their guidance and advice makes them feel good. In the Afghan context, good advice has often meant a matter of life or death.

They are anxious now that families allow for their participation and inclusion in the areas of life that affect them most. They feel competent of being involved in family discussions because they believe their ideas can be a valuable resource for the family.

It is common for adults to view children as passive and incapable of taking on responsibility. Though this contradicts the reality of many children, involved in working and feeding their families, the classic understanding is 'adults know best'. This belief increases the more vulnerable and marginal children are. For example, disabled children are considered more incapable than able-bodied children.

Many times, space simply does not exist for girls and boys to discuss the things that worry or confuse them. One of the reasons for this is the cultural barrier that makes certain topics of discussion taboo. Parents can also lack information and feel discomfort in answering their children's questions.

Children commonly face situations where they are not free to express themselves in front of adults. This is also the cultural norm. The position children have in relationship to adults means it is often unthinkable to question the authority of elders. They find both parents and teachers unwilling to involve them in discussions. This has the effect of limiting their development and intellect. Children feel that participation in school is essential for their learning.

Children need reassurance that asking for their rights is an acceptable thing to do. They need safe spaces and an encouraging environment for their participation. They often lack adult support. Adults are unaware of the role participation can play and the benefits it can have for them and in the lives of children. They have not been exposed to the idea that children learn more effectively when they are engaged with kindly, and that children feel hurt when they are not considered.

Involving children in processes can have remarkable effects on them and society. They feel energized and abundant in creativity. Allowing children to participate increases their ability to question and stimulates learning. Through participation children can learn tolerance, negotiation skills and the need for compromise. They have the potential to develop into adults with thinking capability. These are especially important skills in the light of a culture that has seen so much of violence.

Children can be involved in simple and far-reaching ways. A girl in the Warduj closing session gave the suggestion that children can be included in '*shura*' meetings. Including children essentially means altering norms. Adults need to begin by questioning their own preconceived ideas about children.

We are not allowed to express our ideas to the school teachers
Boy 11-14, Kabul

I am afraid when my wishes are not considered
Girl 15-18, Herat

I wish my parents would ask me about my future
Girl 15 -18, Surkh Rood

I am happy when my parents talk with me
I am happy when my parents give me advice
They think our minds are small but we can think about our lives
Girl in Herat

Village children face a lot of problems which our culture does not allow them to discuss. They are not allowed to express their feelings. We want someone to discuss our problems with the community
Girl in Badakshan

We are not allowed to express our ideas in front of elders
Boy 15-18, Kabul.

When I am talking and somebody is telling me I am too small and should shut up, it makes me sad
Girl 11-14,Jalalabad

We need the support from adults
Girls in Warduj

I would like this seminar to continue with children all over the country
Girl 11-14 Mazar

When people answer our salaams, it makes me happy
Boy 11-14 Surkh Rood

8.4 The rights framework

Children seem hopeful that peaceful times will open channels of communication with adults. They find resonance in the idea of children's right to participate, because feeling left out of processes is a familiar experience for them. Looking at these issues in a framework of rights is a new encounter for both children and adults. For children, knowing about rights has helped them identify problems and situations they feel violated by. It has given them a context in which to place their feelings and concerns. Children hold on to the notion of child rights, throughout the consultations and thereafter. Rights become a tool to think of ways to take action.

Girls and boys have found talking about rights in a religious context a useful strategy when appealing to adults[1]. Children's rights are embedded in Islam and there are links between Islamic principles of equity and CRC. Girls find resonance in Islam, which advocates female participation in the family.

Learning about the universality of rights gives children a sense of collective strength, which further empowers them.

> ***I wish that these kinds of consultations could be arranged once a month so that children could participate and talk about their difficulties***
> Boy15-18,Herat
>
> *There should be formation of a CRC commission to discuss children's issues with the government*
> **Girl 15-18, Kabul**
>
> ***We hope the adults would not abuse the rights given to us by Allah***
> Boy 11-14 ,Jalalabad
>
> ***The families must ask girls about their lives - this is not against Islam - Our great prophet asked his daughter 'do you want to marry this person?***
> Girl 15-18, Herat.
>
> ***Young people in Afghanistan are the same as in other countries; we want the same education as they have in other countries***
> Girl 15-18 Herat

8.5 Children's experiences of discrimination

The second article of the CRC relates to respecting and ensuring the rights of all children without discrimination[1] of any kind. The root cause of many forms of violence and

exploitation experienced by both adults and children is discrimination. Various other articles in the CRC[1] call for action to prevent discrimination of children who are particularly vulnerable to abuse (i.e. children with disabilities, child refugees and others.)

Children have wide experiences and understanding of discrimination, and its impact. Having lived through civil war, ethnic cleansing, and extreme forms of gender and ethnic harassment under Taliban, children have witnessed and understood the connections between discrimination and violence. They testify their many experiences of discrimination in the consultations – of being discriminated against because of being small, as ethnic minorities, and because they are disabled, orphaned, returning refugees, poor or female. Children experience discrimination in a variety of ways; exclusion, favoritism, access to and control over resources and violations. One of the most damaging ways discrimination manifests is through the tool of violence.

Children have a lot to say about the issue of discrimination, because of their own experiences and having witnessed other children being marginalized.

The boys and girls in the consultations uphold strong beliefs in the values of non-discrimination and equality.

> ***I wish for peace in my country and that children from every ethnic groups and religious group should have a safe life***
>
> Boy 11-14, Kabul

8.6 Children with disabilities

Girls and boys in the consultations are extremely conscious about issues surrounding disability, especially the social exclusion of disabled children. Their level of consciousness is of no surprise. Local surveys indicate that about 3 percent of the population in Afghanistan is disabled. Children with disabilities have been part of most consultations. The main concern for children with disabilities (who participated in the consultations) is the desire to be treated the same as other children, and to have the same opportunities. They clearly face overt prejudice and are often made to feel extremely conscious of their dissimilarity to other children. Children with disabilities are also vulnerable to being teased, harassed and violated.

Children with disabilities are not integrated into mainstream schools and left out of education because there are no schools that cater to their special needs. They feel excluded at a community level too. They are largely perceived as inactive. Availability and condition of health facilities are a major concern because health care needs of children with disabilities are much higher. Facilities are poor across the country particularly in the provinces and rural areas. The impact of disability intensifies due to gender and poverty. Girls with disabilities find it harder to go to school. Their access to medical facilities is impeded by shortage of female doctors and social restrictions imposed on women.

2. Foreword

Children and young people begin to redefine themselves in new and creative ways, when they are supported in their right to speak out. When they do this on their own terms with support of adults, they can be agents for improvement and progress.

Girls and boys in the consultations received the space to talk with enormous gratitude. They often perceived it as a gift, rather than seeing it as their right. The special feeling children have when they are allowed to say things they have previously kept inside cannot be disregarded. Many said they did not want the consultation to end. Some felt it had all been like a dream. They all hoped for more opportunities like this to come. Such responses expose how atypical the experience of inclusion is for Afghan girls and boys in their daily lives. It reaffirms the responsibility of adults to encourage and inform children of their right to be included. This is also a challenge to the organizations working to improve the lives of children. Efforts must be made for children's inclusion and participation to become a norm, rather than a special occasion.

But changing norms is hardly an easy task. Inclusion reminds us that adults too, have to consider children in a new light, and alter behaviors, often in drastic ways. By gaining insight into the dreams and thoughts and also the pain and hurt of young people, and through witnessing their courage, adults have been observed to change dramatically, in short spaces of time, both in their ideology and in their actions. Many parents, relatives, community leaders and teachers involved in this project, started to look at the way they relate to their own children. They decided never to beat them again, and pledged to find more honorable ways to communicate with their children at home and in classrooms.

Children picture a society without discrimination, war and corruption, but filled with equity, love, and concern for each other. Of course this is far from the reality in which they live now. But surely these are not just the hopes and dreams of children? On the contrary, the themes that girls and boys have chosen are affecting everybody. Hardship, discrimination and violence are universal themes. Despite their vulnerability, Afghan children have taken the courageous step to raise such tough questions even in a public forum. They deserve to be heard.

Undoubtedly, girls and boys in these consultations are breaking the silence around many questions which adults are often reticent to talk about. In this, children represent new resources and powerful agents of change. If they can be recognized as such, it gives enormous hope for the country to transform positively. Samat Khan, a former commander who heard the children and young people in his Badakshan village express their dreams and hopes, sums up this thought:

If we treat children with respect, we will have a place to live that is good for all of us

Able-bodied children in the consultations show enormous compassion towards the added hardships children with disabilities. Girls and boys believe that children with disabilities need special care and attention. They suggest special facilities and opportunities for disabled children to lead dignified and comfortable lives[1]. Children need assistance from others to tackle these issues. They call on the government, communities and international NGO's in addressing the 'able bodied' bias.

I wish for a day when I can walk like other children without sticks
Boy 15-18, Herat

I wish the girls would not tell me that I'm disabled and I do not want to marry you
Boy 15-18. Herat

When I see my friends harass disabled people I feel angry
Boy 11-14, Kabul

I wish there was a special school for disabled children so that I could go there and get both theory and vocational training
Boy 11-14 Herat

I want to find a doctor to treat my leg
Girl 11-14 Kandahar

Disabled people need special opportunities
Child 8-10, Mazar

I wish there was a committee for disabled children so they can solve their difficulties Boy 15-18, Herat

Disabled children should be supported by the community and government and they should be respected
Girl, closing session, Warduj, Badakshan

8.7 Ethnicity as a difference

Ethnicity has historically played into war and conflict times in Afghanistan[1]. The Hazara community has been most discriminated against. Interestingly, only a few children mention ethnic discrimination in the consultations. This is possibly because ethnic conflict has mostly been as a result of political motivation rather than because of abhorrence between ethnic groups. Some children in Herat mention ethnic discrimination and girls from the religious Hindu minority in Jalalabad also spoke out about sectarian discrimination.

Turkmen children should have a public school - we are Afghan as well as the others and we have the same right to learn'
Girl 11-14 Herat
We are Hindu, but we are still human beings

8.8 Children in difficult circumstances

Poverty is an overarching reality for most people in Afghanistan. Many children in the consultations live in conditions of extreme poverty. The economic divide in the country is reflected in many statements and poems children write about the difference between rich and poor, leaders and children. This disparity is felt as discrimination. For example poorer children complain of not having access to good schools, and of being subjected to unfair treatment by teachers in school. Some wish for a school uniform that standardizes dress code so that poorer children feel less targeted.

Increased economic vulnerability is known to place children at a higher risk and places people at a social disadvantage. Parents are often forced to send children out to work on the streets, or in small enterprises, to become child soldiers, or sell off their daughters to recover debt. Poverty means working, displaced or orphaned children cannot go to school. Health problems increase and are aggravated by lack of clinics catering at a subsidized rate. IDP children experience a constant sense of economic and social upheaval. Living in IDP camps, they are forced to focus on activities such as finding ways to earn money for food. Children in orphanages[1] live in overcrowded and poor conditions and are also vulnerable to violence and neglect.

Interestingly only a few children speak about the desire for money. Rather, boys and girls prioritize the importance of education and improvement in services as solutions to poverty. Children place the government as responsible for the lack of services.

I would be happy to have uniforms in school
Boy 11-14, Mazar
Because of the new regime, something is wrong, for example, the rich people can go to Estaqlal High School and they will not accept the poor people
Boy 11-14 Kabul
The doctors help the rich people and the medicine is not available for the poor people Boys in Warduj
All the boys and girls who are living in the IDP camp do not have jobs and the winter is coming. We will meet more difficulties
Girl 15-18, Herat

We do not want big things; we want clothes, shelter and schools. God will give us food

Child 8-10, Mazar

We want the government to support poor people

Child 8-10, Mazar

8.9 Different experiences of girls and boys

Gender cuts across ethnicity, religion and class[1]. There is a gender standard expected of boys, as there is with girls. The classic arrangement is that boys are responsible for productive work and girls are responsible for reproduction, care giving and the domestic front.

I wish instead of making bricks there would be an easier job to do

Boy in Herat

It is interesting to note how children in the consultations respond to and articulate their gender concerns. Girls more vehemently feel gender discrimination as a daily 'lived' experience. Girls of all ages in every location mention the discrimination they face as a result of being girls. Boys do not think that the hardships they face might be gender related. Rather, they see the roles and expectations of both boys and girls as 'natural'. Indeed, though boys are observant of other types of discrimination ie. of disabled or poor children, they rarely raise the issue of gender discrimination against girls.

8.10 Gender discrimination for boys

Boys are socially expected to behave according to their gender. One of the essential ingredients is to be fearless and strong from a young age. Boys do not question this and feel it to be 'natural' to be so. This explains the complete absence of reference by boys in the consultations, to difficulties arising out of being in the role of protector. The responsibility to protect wife, sister, daughter, family, community and nation starts at home, with the role of *mahram.* Boys have to accompany the girls and women in their family at all times, when they go outside of the home[1]. Boys in the consultations do not refer to their role as *mahrams* either positively or negatively.[1]

An area of gender concern for boys is that of labor responsibility and the role of provider for the family. Boys are pushed into the public arena at a young age, having to find work, food, and do errands for the home. They are relied upon to perform household duties, like collecting water, in highly insecure situations. Some boys feel positive about their provider role, giving them a sense of purpose and responsibility, while others express difficulty.

Working puts boys at higher risk of violence, exhaustion, and exposes them to diseases and accidents. Expectations to work, means they are sent out into an adult world without protection. Further they are vulnerable to all kinds of violence and exploitation in the street or workplace. Boys dislike this role when it means that boys lose out on educational opportunities.

Many of the boys in the consultations worry about their role of provider. It puts pressure on having a means to earn, a career, a job or trade, ideas closely connected with building and supporting a family. It seems also to expose a greater fear of poverty amongst boys highlighting their fear of inadequacy at not being able to provide;

Given the importance placed on family, gender also validates most boys in relation to their own sense of masculinity. It asserts the notion that others are dependant upon them. Girls also affirm the importance of boys to adopt this role.

Cultures of violence support boys and young men in thinking that aggression is a positive attribute of masculinity. Boys grow up with little other than archetypal male role models of being aggressive, dominating and uncompromising. These attributes are nurtured by the 'gun culture' that prevails. Poverty might drive young boys into the local armies of militiamen.

I wish to be strong and brave

Boy in Surkh Rood

Working is difficult for me

Boy 11-14, Herat

I wish I didn't have to provide money for my family

Boy Herat

I am very unhappy when I am working and there's no chance of going to school

Boy 11-14, Surkh Rood

I wish I didn't get the salary from the owner of the shop together with beatings and bad words

Boy 15-18, Herat

I am afraid that because I am so poor I will not be able to marry

Boy 15-18, Surkh Rood

We are afraid of poverty and being jobless

Boy 15-18, Kandahar

When I am supporting my family with part time work I am happy

Boy 11-14, Mazar

Instead of sending us to the army, you should send us to school

Boy in Argu

8.11 Girl's experiences of discrimination

Girls are highly conscious and articulate on issues that significantly affect their lives because of their gender. They complain about the discrimination they face as girls over and above any other form of discrimination. Some girls face more discrimination than others. It varies from family to family, and according to class, age, geographic location and community[1]. Girls have faced many violations especially during the Taliban.

Gender restrictions impinge on all areas of girl's lives. Education, security, mobility and lack of decision-making power are key areas identified by girls as problematic. The family, mostly male members take decisions for them, which has a major impact on their self-confidence and sense of well-being.

Girls are socialized from an early age to recognize the home as their prime location and to know that their movement will be restricted as they get older. It is from being situated in the home, that much of the inequality amongst girls is felt. In general, they are discouraged and prevented from occupying public spaces without escort. Girls and women are also expected to socialize within the family, and not with friends or colleagues at work. These norms are more strictly applied in rural areas but are also prevalent in cities. Society perpetuates these norms, but it is parents and male family members who directly implement gender restrictions on their daughters or sisters[1]. Girls are conflicted by the distress that mobility restrictions cause them and the sense of loyalty and obedience they feel towards their families.

The worst time for women's movement in public was during the Taliban. Women under Taliban suffered punishment, such as public whippings, if they did not comply with dress and mobility rules. Freedom of movement, dress and speech of women and girls was severely hampered. Many girls express a fear of this happening again;

When girls describe what they are 'allowed to do' in the consultations, they often mention chores that are expected of them as girls. Some describe this work as enjoyable, while others find it difficult and not satisfying.

Girls make frequent mention of mobility restrictions and firmly locate this as gender related discrimination. Many girls are unlikely to work outside the home, but instead are expected to help out with domestic work. Some girls are restricted from doing household jobs that involve going outside of the house.

The most upsetting part of gender discrimination for girls is the decisions made by others on marriage. Girls worry about early marriage and being forced to marry someone they don't know. This is especially significant for those in the 15-18 group. Early marriage means mostly a halt to education and limited chances of employment.

Another key concern articulated by girls is participation in education[1]. This is perceived as opening doors to opportunities for future and important for self-esteem. Despite an overall increase in access to education, since the fall of Taliban, in the Southern city of Kandahar, reports indicate that girls still remain far less visible in the schools than boys[1]. Girls in the Kandahar consultation confirm this lack of focus on girl's education. Power lies in the hands of the parents' decision whether or not to send their daughters to school.

Girls living in rural areas often face more barriers in accessing education[1]. Many girls have lost out on huge chunks of their studies during Taliban. This disadvantaged them hugely in their learning. Having already experienced a ban on education, many girls express fear that this may happen again.

Girls are refusing to remain silent on the issues of gender discrimination. They put the responsibility on parents to encourage equality between themselves and their brothers. They also articulate what needs to be done to improve gender inequality at a wider level and very much perceive themselves as being part of the change towards equality. They speak with a rights language, aware of what it will take to make Afghanistan a better place for them.

I wish men could be like women

Girl in the Herat

When I am not allowed to wear elegant clothes I feel sad

Girl 11-14, Jalalabad

I'm afraid of wearing the burqa"

Girl 15-18,Kabul

Being at home all the time makes me sad

Girl 11-14, Surkh Rood

We are not allowed to play with people who are not our mahrams

Girl 11-14, Herat

I'm afraid if the Taliban come back, I have to wear the burqa

Girl 15-18, Kabul

I'm allowed to sweep, clean the house, wash the dishes, make dough

Girl 15-18, Surkh Rood

I am unhappy washing the dishes

Girl 15-18, Kabul

Families say that girls should not go to school, they must work in the house, but this is not right

Girl 15-18, Herat

I'm not allowed to carry water from outside



Pleasure

Early marriages make me sad because we don't get a higher education
Girl, Kandahar, 11-14

I'm afraid of marriage by force
Girl 15-18 Kabul

I wish I did not have to marry early
Girl 11-14, Kandahar

When there is no education for girls I feel sad
Girl 11-14, Kandahar

I wish I could have a country where girls could go to school and they could be engineers and doctors
Girl 15-18, Surkh Rood

In the villages there are many talented girls and they are not allowed to go to school, and it makes me sad
Girl 15-18, Jalalabad

I am afraid if the Taliban comes and closes down our school
Girl 11-14, Kabu

I want to solve my problems through having a job, but there is no job I can take
Girl 15-18, Herat

It makes me happy if the parents treat their daughters as their sons without discrimination
Girl 15-18, Kabul

I want to be a judge to defend women's rights
Girl 15-18 Mazar

It is my dream that the law should give us freedom
Girl 15-18, Herat

9. Children and pleasure

9.1 Children's right to pleasure and the importance of play

Children have a right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities, according to Article 31 of the CRC. This right and need for children to play is frequently forgotten in the adult world. Besides, it is not always possible for adults to find the means for their children to have entertainment or recreation. The armed conflicts and political repression have dominated the lives of children in Afghanistan and have prevented them from normal play or entertainment activities. In spite of this, girls and boys have not lost the spirit for enjoyment. They have the same longing for pleasure and happiness as children elsewhere in the world, and seek to find ways to realize these desires. Play is an important aspect of bringing to children what they essentially need - happiness, fulfillment and confidence in themselves.

In addition, play is an essential part of child development. It has been established that children need play to be able to socially connect as adults. It is even more crucial for those children who have been exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation or armed conflict to have access to and engagement in play. This is one of the most powerful ways to heal trauma and bring normality back into a child's life. Play helps rebuild trust, encourages children to learn cooperation and negotiation skills, which increases their overall participation in society[1].

> ***When I am playing with other children I am happy***
> Child in Surkh Rood
>
> ***Being on a swing makes me happy***
> Child in Mazar
>
> ***I would like the children to play and not fight***
> **Child in Surkh Rood**

9.2 What makes children happy?

Children in the consultations are asked what makes them feel happy and sad. When they talk of pleasurable activity it is often spoken about as a wish for the future, rather than something that is being experienced in their present lives. In other words being without the things that bring joy is a common experience for many girls and boys. However, in the direst of situations, despite huge social, political, economic and cultural limitations, children and young people constantly find ways and means of entertaining themselves.

Basic themes of happiness identified by girls and boys in discussions include:

- Being with people (in a happy atmosphere)

- Going to social gatherings and events
- Appearance and looking nice, wearing new and clean clothes
- Playing
- Eating luxury food
- Fun
- Entertainment like TV, music and going to movies
- Love
- Religion
- A clean and green environment

Many girls and boys describe being with family and friends at home and in social gatherings as the primary source of their happiness.

Knowing that one's parents and relatives are alive and nearby is of immense importance to girls and boys. The fact that a great many families have been shattered and dislocated by the war and extreme poverty makes this even more important. Many children and young people express that happiness comes from a feeling of togetherness and living within the family in an atmosphere of peace. If parents are unhappy or fighting, this affects this sensation of happiness. Many girls and boys also comment how giving and receiving love brings them contentment.

Friends form an important social connection for children. Many children in the consultations made friends with each other, exchanging stories and developing a group identity around their concerns. Friendship allows for the possibility of young people to support each other, which is not so easy in relationships with adults. Children can understand each other best and spending time with friends brings happiness too.

The poverty that dominates their lives make children find happiness in the most basic things such as having better livelihood conditions, amenities and public services. Going to school is a frequent response to this question too.

Having new, clean and fashionable clothes are important to young people. Adolescent girls, especially, cite this as something that makes them feel good about themselves. Style becomes all the more important to girls because in public they have to cover up. What they wear underneath is symbolic for their individual identity and vital for their self-esteem. Choices in life are a marked response from girls regarding when they talk about what makes them happy.

Having a pleasant environment is wished for because girls and boys feel calm and happy from seeing nice things around them. Seeing green trees or birds flying is an uplifting experience as compared to the usual dirty, dusty and unstimulating surroundings of most urban environments. Such surroundings are not good for children in terms of their health and safely.

Girls and boys entertain themselves in many creative ways usually with almost nothing except their imagination. Having toys, storybooks, games, sports equipment and

playgrounds brings children of all ages and backgrounds enormous pleasure and fulfillment.

I am happy being with my father when he is loving
Laughing makes me happy, Indian movies, going to school, playing, or when there is a wedding or a picnic
When people love each other it makes me happy
Boy 11-14, Kabul

I am happy when I am living with my family
Child 8-10, Mazar

Seeing my parents and relatives makes me happy
Having hospitals makes me happy
Children 8-10, Jalalabad

I am happy when there is no violence
Child 8-10, Kandahar

I like having good friends
Being an independent person makes me happy
Girl 11-14, Surk Rood

When I am wearing a blouse and trousers I am happy
Girl Mazar 11-15

I am happy when I am wearing clean clothes
Child 8-10

I am happy when I see flowers and a green area
Boy 11-14, Herat

I am happy when I see pigeons
Child 8-10, Mazar

I like playing volleyball
Boy 11-14, Mazar

I like riding bicycles
Boy 15-18, Kandahar

When my father buys me a doll I feel happy

9.3 Barriers to play

Play is one of the few areas that allows for spontaneous and creative expression and therefore contributes to children's psychological well being. In terms of physical health it is important that children and young people spend time exercising their bodies. However, most children find themselves unable to engage in play activities for a variety of reasons.

Children's needs for play are quite simple. They require safe, accessible space. It is a common request of girls and boys to have safe places to play as an alternative to the street, which presents many dangers to them. This is particularly important for parents to

3. Presentation of the project

Ahead of the UN Special Session on Children in May 2002, the Global Movement for Children's Working Group for Afghanistan arranged consultations with 1500 Afghan children and young people around the country and in refugee villages in Pakistan. Many organizations were involved to make sure that Afghan children and young people's voices were heard when the United Nations for the first time dedicated a meeting exclusively to children. Messages from the consultations throughout Afghanistan were collected in a booklet - "Afghanistan Children speak to the UN Special Session" and distributed to participants in the New York meeting. The Consultation Project is a continuation of this process that had started in 2001.

3.1 Funding and implementation

UNICEF funded the consultation project and it has been under the wings of the Global Movement for Children, consisting of both national and international organizations focusing on children and young people's situation. Plans and development have been regularly discussed in the GMC Kabul Working Group. Around the country, many organizations and representatives of local authorities have been cooperating to arrange the consultations and support the follow-up projects started by the participants afterwards. Save the Children Sweden has been in charge of the implementation of the project, with contributions from Save the Children Norway.

3.2 Main goals of the project

We wanted to acknowledge and promote the right of Afghan children and young people to express opinions in matters concerning their own lives. We wanted to show the politicians, parents, teachers and the international community that Afghans under 18 have unrecognized resources and ambitions needed in the reconstruction and development of this country. They are half the population and can make a big difference if their right to be heard and to participate is acknowledged.

3.3 Task

10 consultations in Afghanistan and one with refugee children in Peshawar, with altogether 660 participants was our task. We reached more than 800 children and young people between the age of 8 and 18 in 10 different provinces. Consultations were held in Mazar-I-Sherif, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Surkh Rood, Bamyan, Gardez, Sar-e-Pul, Shiberghan and in two villages in Badakshan. Refugee children in Peshawar focused on the children's feelings about repatriation in their consultation. The first consultation took place in October 2002, the last one in November 2003. After the consultations, many have continued working together in groups to promote their own rights in the communities.

3.4 How did we choose locations?

We wanted to reach as many parts of the country as possible, so that all ethnic groups were included. At the same time, we needed cooperating partners to take on the responsibility of arranging the consultations and being in charge of follow-up projects in each location. We also needed to look at the logistics and security conditions.

feel comfortable in sending their children out to play[1]. Many children in the consultations report facing obstacles in accessing play facilities such as playgrounds, sports clubs, parks etc. because there are none around the locality in which they live. Security is a major worry for parents, which limit girls and boys, access to outdoor play. Cultural norms[1] also affect children's play activities.

Due to war damage and poor economy there is a shortage of entertainment facilities i.e. sports clubs, cinema halls and parks in most cities and towns. In rural areas, such entertainment is non traditional, though video and television have become popular forms of entertainment which some families have. Overall, children therefore have fewer options for recreation and enjoyment available to them.

It is typical that children enjoy and feel happy when they have special things to eat, which is why they like to go to wedding parties and ceremonies so much. Under normal circumstances a variety of food is a luxury, which few people can afford. Families also struggle with limited means to buy toys and games for their children.

My dream day is:

To have breakfast with milk, cakes, cookies and cheeses. Go to school. At the school we will have good teachers, enough books and training material and children's publications to read. 12: good lunch, like kebab. After lunch we will go to English courses. We will have nice dresses and visit our friends and play with them. We will eat a good dinner and watch TV with a dish antenna, then do our homework

Girl in Warduj closing session

Girls and boys speak of not having time to partake in their favorite games or go for entertainment. Children's right to leisure encompasses more than having enough time to sleep at night. It is necessary for children to have some time in between work and education for themselves. They feel resentment at times, because having to work often means time for play is lost to them.

Without rest, a child is unable to learn, her or his eating patterns are disturbed, and he or she is vulnerable to ill health. Children are many times exempt from rest because of domestic responsibility, income-generating activities for the family or having to work in family enterprises.

Being heard in the family brings children hope and happiness. The norm of non-inclusion however impacts on children's happiness and access to pleasurable activity. Children report for instance, that television and radio programs are made for adults and do not cater for them. Storybooks for children hardly exist and the few young people with access to TV complain that cartoons are old and programs are repeated. Cultural and gender



Dreaming a Dream

restriction also prevent children from participating in activities that make them feel happy.

I wish there would be a playground for young people and children, to go there when they feel tired
Herat child

I wish we could have sports clubs because people say that sport is health
Boy 15-18, Herat

I wish I had a playground near to my house where I could easily go
Boy 15-18, Herat

When I see girls playing in the streets I feel sad
Child 8-10, Mazar

We are not allowed to fly kites
Boy 15-18, Kandahar

Our problem is that in the villages we don't have a sports club
Boy 15-18, Herat

A little entertainment, this is our wish
Boy 15-18, Kandahar

I would like to have a football
Boy 15-18 Herat

When I am eating cake I am happy
Girl in Argu

If someone asks me to work when I am playing I feel sad
Boy11-14, Mazar

Early in the morning I am going to school, then I am helping my father in his shop, doing chores in the bazaar, helping my mother with house tasks, carrying wood, looking after sheep in the desert
Child 8-10, Kandahar

I wish I could spend my free time after school with drawing and reading interesting books instead of doing the work that is very difficult for me
Boy 15-18, Herat

Freedom of expression makes me happy
Boy 11-14

We are not allowed to play games which are not good for us
Boy 15-18, Jalalabad

I am not allowed to go on picnics
Girl 11-14, Kandahar

10. Dreaming a dream

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams"
Eleanor Roosevelt

10.1 The importance of dreaming

When children in the consultations reveal their ideas of the future, it is with a hopeful and optimistic outlook. They talk positively about what lies ahead and remember with weariness things in the past that they want to leave behind. The prospect of sustainable peace may yet be unsure; nevertheless children's dreams are full of energy for a productive future.

Girls and boys imagine how they would like the world to be. They would like to see children have a normal life like children in other parts of the world. In imagining or designing a future in their minds, they feel their faith in the continuation of progress and stability. Belief in a happy future for oneself, family or community, is an essential part of their healing.

Children's dreams and wishes for the future reflect a desire to see transformation in society and family values, the environment, in the ways of relating, tradition, and access to information, rights and opportunity. They are unafraid of change and see it as necessary to create a situation where they and others can live with dignity and respect. When children talk about the difficulties in their present circumstances, they imagine something better for themselves, their families and for other children.

One of the most valued aspects of change, linked to children's concept of future, is peace. Peace features as part of many children's dream and still remains something imaginary. Peace is linked to many other things that children need or desire, the most important being to feel secure, protected and safe. The idea of peace opens up opportunities for girls and boys to do normal things, like going to school, or being cared for by the family.

As children articulate a vision that includes lasting peace, a forceful truth becomes apparent. Life, as they experience it, is still far from normal. For a vast majority, living in extreme conditions of poverty, wishes and dreams are an appeal for normality in having basic services and facilities.

Infrastructure gives children a sense of security and permanence. Without light and warmth in winter, children cannot study. Light signifies hope, while darkness leads to continuing conditions of depression and children are afraid of what the dark might bring. Children's dreams of having basic facilities, even a house, a wall or a clock suggest a continuing anxiety around safety and indicate that they live often without a sense of well being, and basic comforts are a remote dream.

The future, as children describe it, reflects both collective and individual aims. Hopes correspond to children's needs and desires as individuals, but are also symbolic of needs of other children, communities, families and the nation.

The sense of nationhood that all children seem to project is reflected in many of their statements. It is noticeable that children have tremendous love and pride for their country and see Afghanistan as the homeland. Their national identity is a powerful resource that comes from their own experiences of war and witnessing the damage of the country's prosperity. It also comes from popular notions surrounding the national resistance to invasion and occupation and the glorification of martyrdom. Pride around the safeguarding of Afghan culture despite long years of war, is passed down from older to younger generations. The potential of nationalism to motivate young people in working for Afghanistan can be seen as extremely valuable in terms of future nation building.

By and large, girls and boys' immediate collective dream is to do with making their country a better place to live in. They have strong determination to raise the standard of their country and society as opposed to focusing only on individual concerns. Young people's professional dreams are linked to reconstruction of society and putting together infrastructure in the country. As noted before, ambitions and dreams of young people correspond to the idea of being included.

Children want to become engineers, doctors, judges, computer operators and mechanics to build roads, make machines or help people who are disadvantaged. It also means being in positions of power to bring justice and peace to society.

Girls' and boys' individual dreams are also linked to national development, but also suggest a need to 'be' someone of status and importance. Children identify having power as being a person who is respected in society for his or her education or profession. It is apparent that girls and boys think that only adults get such status, control and respect. This confirms the reality that children and young people are not given social position and their opinions are disregarded, as children.

In order to make a future, children very often believe that it depends on adult support. For this reason they are sometimes apprehensive about what the future holds for them. Marriage brings anxiety because it means girls cannot follow personal ambitions. It literally feels to them as if they are going into unknown territory.

A bright future makes me happy
Boy 11-14, Kandahar

I dream that my father finds a good job and comes home early and not at 11 o'clock at night feeling sad
Girl 15-18, Herat

I dream that there would be no discrimination between boys and girls
Girl 15-18, Herat

I wish that my country will have peace also in the future

Boy 8-10 Herat

I dream that peace comes to Afghanistan, we just needs schools and education

We should love people, we should live in peace. It is my dream that someone should take care of us.

I like chairs and clocks

Girl 11-14 Mazar

We do not have enough wells. In the whole village there is only one

Child 8-10 Surkh Rood

Being in a safe atmosphere makes me happy

Girl 11-14 Surkh Rood

We wish we could have a well lit place

Child 8-10, Surkh Rood

We do not have bathrooms in our houses

Boy 15-18

I want to build my country

Boy 11-14 Surkh Rood

Why do young people go to other countries? Why don't they work for their country?

Boy 15-18 Herat

Working hard for our country makes me happy

Girl 11-14 Jalalabad

It is my dream to become an engineer

Girl 15-18 Herat

I wish I could be a doctor who could treat people without money

Child 8-10 Surkh Rood

I want to be a judge to defend women's rights

I want to be a doctor with a white coat

Girl 15-18 Herat

I dream that I graduate from Oxford in London and have my own hospital and my own operation room

Girl 15-18 Herat

We are not allowed to make our future bright

Boy 11-14 Kandahar

We were like the bird in the cage, but now we found a small window to go out and make our future, if the elders give us a chance

Girl 15-18 Kandahar

I'm afraid of my future and what I will be

Girl 15-18 Herat

Children also describe the future as including pleasure and joy. In some groups, children were asked to describe a dream day, which gave them an opportunity to share what they liked and disliked about their day and how they would imagine it to be made better. Many children's real day lacked in description of personal pleasure, time for themselves and emotional feeling. Dream days on the other hand included happiness, fulfillment and entertainment and overall there was a happier emotion emerging in the descriptions.

My real day: I pray, I read my sabaq (Islamic lesson), I eat breakfast, then I go to school, then I work around the house, do my homework, read the sabaq.

My dream day: I could go to school and after school we should have a good time and entertainment and be in a well-lit place and if we could have TV, we could watch TV and if we could have tapes, we could listen to them and have a good time. Child in Surkh Rood

A poem about the future

The future is in the children's hands
Because the children of today are the young people of tomorrow
How long can children are kept away from science, technology and education?
In the streets and in the bazaar the children are without shelter
How long will the war continue in this country?

11. Resource Bibliography

- ε Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF
- ε SCS Afghanistan Survey Report on Corporal Punishment, June 2003
- ε "Ijaza Nista" – A Baseline Survey of Women's Conditions in Kandahar. Afghan's For Civil Society, July 2003
- ε The Children of Kabul – Discussions with Afghan Families, Save the Children USA/UNICEFJune 2003
- ε Afghanistan's Children Speak to the UN Special Session, Save the Children Sweden
- ε Human Rights Watch Report on Human Rights Violations of Women and Girls in Herat, September 2002
- ε Quality of Primary Teacher Education in Afghanistan, Save the Children Alliance April 2003
- ε Children's Participation, experiences in capacity building and training. Save the Children Sweden. 2002.
- ε The women of Hazarajat, www.hazara.net
- ε Respect essential for the survival of the Pashtun Culture, Charles Lindhom, professor of Anthropology, Boston University
- ε Reports from all consultations. Consultation Team, Save the Children Sweden

3.5 Starting up/finding focal points

When we had chosen a location, we contacted a child-focused organization there and asked them to arrange a meeting with potential partners and representatives of local authorities. Our aim for the first meeting was to explain the project and the ideas behind it and to find a focal point organization which could take the responsibility of identifying facilitators for the children's discussions, coordinate the preparations for the consultation and also be in charge of the follow-up projects.

3.6 Cooperation

Our focal points have been Save the Children UK and several youth organizations in Mazar, Sar-e-Pul and Shiberghan, Save the Children Japan and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in Bamyan, UNICEF and War Child, later the International Rescue Committee and the Turkmen Youth Association in Herat, Save the Children Sweden, UNHCR and the AIHRC in Jalalabad and Surkh Rood, the Social Welfare Cell and Save the Children Sweden in Peshawar, Intersos and UNICEF, later Save UK in Kandahar and Save the Children Japan, the Hearing Impaired Foundation of Afghanistan (HIFA) and Aschiana, the center for street-working children in Kabul. Several others have made valuable contributions.

3.7 Cooperation with the authorities

We have cooperated with and received support from the Ministry of Planning, Labour and Social Affairs, Women Affairs and Education. Locally, representatives of the local authorities have participated in preparations and come to the events where the children and young people have presented their issues.

3.8 Facilitators

The focal point identified at least 5 facilitators in each location. We wanted people who like to be with children, who are willing to learn new methods and work with children for the improvement of children's lives. They had to be literate. At least two of them had to be women to facilitate the girls' groups.

A facilitation manual was made by a consultant and the facilitators went through a training session that lasted at least 3 days. They were made familiar with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, learned about facilitating work with children and went through the program for the consultations to get a concrete understanding of the exercises and questions. A group of children was often invited so they could practice the new skills and discuss their experience together.

3.9 The consultation program

The consultation program was simple, with questions and exercises everybody could relate to. We wanted the children to look at and discuss their present situation and hopes for the future. We focused on what changes the children and young people want and what needs to be done in order to achieve these improvements in the communities. The participants learned about the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Global

Movement for Children. At the end, they received a certificate saying they had been participants in the "We are the Future of Afghanistan" consultation in their community.
The participants were divided into different groups, with the smallest girls and boys in the same group, but in their own groups from the age of 11.

3.10 Which children participated?

The right to speak and be heard belongs to all children. A lot of effort went into the selection of the participants. This was also important in order to give us information about as many groups of children and young people as possible and let adults see the possibilities and resources of children that are usually invisible. Some of the participants were disabled, some were school children, other children were illiterate, worked or went to home-based schools. They were IDPs, belonged to different ethnic groups, half of them were girls. Both rural and city children participated, three consultations were held with village children.

The quotes here come from the group work when the participants answered questions about what made them happy, sad and afraid, what they were or were not allowed to do and what their real day and dream day was like. Some of the quotes are taken from the event when we invited representatives of the local authorities, teachers and parents to listen to the messages from the young.

3.11 Children speak to the communities

At the end of the children's discussions, we invited members of the public to listen to them in a "closing session". *Shura* members, parents, mullahs, governors, heads of departments, teachers and media came to hear their messages. We rented a nice venue, decorated it, offered lunch to our guests and made it into a festive event.
Whether in the city or in the most remote village, girls and boys came on stage and presented their issues with a self confidence and strength that impressed everybody. They performed role plays, made speeches and read poems with clear opinions against practices considered normal and acceptable by their parents and others – corporal punishment, early or forced marriages, discrimination and lack of understanding from adults. From parents, teachers, mullahs and *shura* members we have seen a great will to listen to the messages from their children, even though they were challenged very directly. It has been a very new experience for the adults to see the talents and capacities of their children, they became very proud and this might have made it easier to accept what they heard.

On a few occasions we had representatives of the local authorities blaming the children for not being right, on a single occasion also attacking the rights of children, but these examples were few and came from politicians who had their special motives for not wanting to encourage free speech.

3.12 Accompanying persons

In order for the families to feel safe, they were invited to send an accompanying person with the child. These were mostly parents, sisters, brothers and teachers. We made a program for them, introducing them to the Convention of the Rights of the Child and

involving them in discussions about how they could support. Some of them had been children before the fighting started and we wrote down the songs and games from the peaceful Afghanistan they remembered.
These accompanying persons proved to be eager to learn and to discuss. Surprisingly many of them were ready to change behaviours towards their children. Often mothers would promise they would not marry off their daughters until the age of 18. We also have examples of accompanying persons volunteering to work with the children's groups after the consultations.

3.13 The documentation of the consultations
All the consultations were recorded and a video will be made about the consultation project. There was also a lot of written material from the groups as the participants wrote down their answers to the questions and frequently also prioritized the issues in the groups. During the consultations we collected a rich material that gave us much information about the participants and their life situations. This material was called "The children's voices".

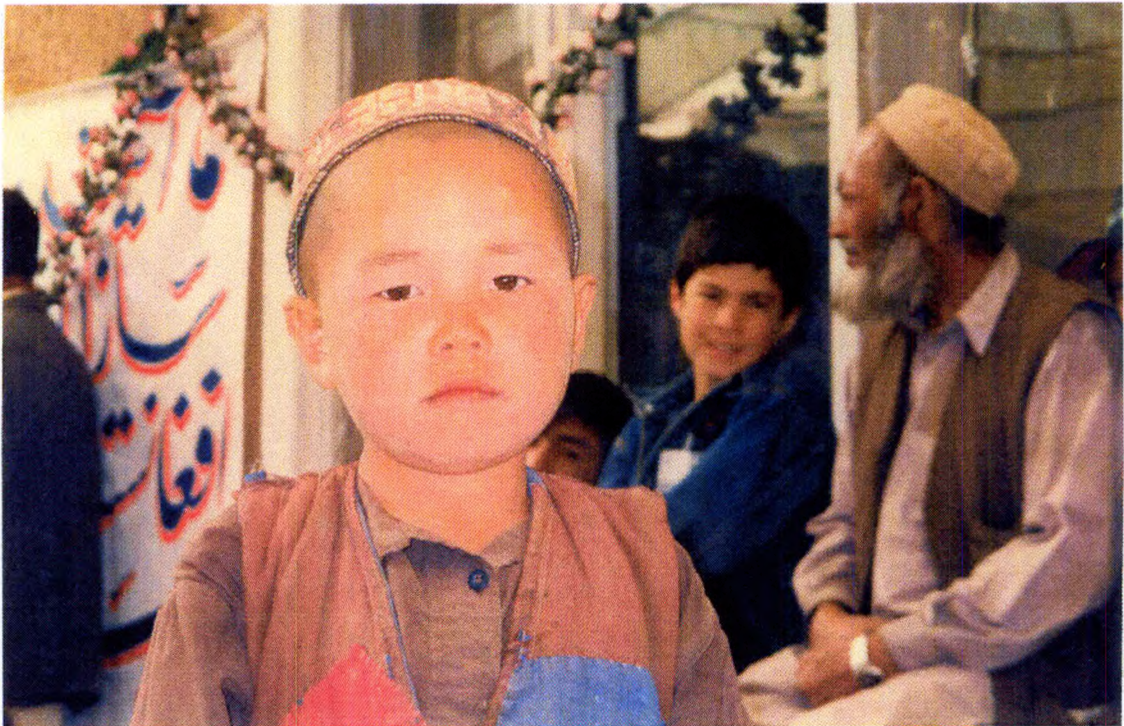
Material from consultations held in Mazar, Kabul, Surk Rood, Herat, Jalalabad, and Badakshan was analyzed during the course of the three-month consultancy from July to September 2003. There was also some material from children in the Maslakh Camp for IDPs in Herat. Secondary information was also studied, including short reports and videotapes from each consultation. These focused mainly on the sessions wherein children and young people presented their wishes and concerns. A list of other resources, which helped in formulating the analysis, can be found at the end of the report. The consultant also visited the groups that have emerged after the consultations in Mazar.
In analyzing the messages from girls and boys, the data was approached bearing in mind that children have the capacity to process social experience and be inventive with ways to cope and adapt to extremely difficult situations. The very fact that children find happiness, despite many odds being set against them, is testimony to this.

Further, children are embedded in social realities, which present enormous challenges to them. And yet they are also creative agents of their own lives rather than victims to circumstances.

Whilst the material from the consultations stands by itself as evidence of how children feel, the messages and appeals were placed in a framework through which children steer their lives.

The methodology of working with the children's voices to create an analysis was as follows:

- Putting children at the center and identifying their life areas which emerge from the statements. Defining some broad questions for the analysis.
- Identifying thematic areas of concern, values and priorities emerging in the children's narratives, statements, role-plays, and actions being planned and taken now by children's groups.



Family and Child

- Finding patterns and variations through comparing age groups, genders and locations

We believe the information gathered here, gives insight into the thoughts, sorrows and dreams of children and young people in Afghanistan. We have much to gain by listening. It is our hope that this report inspires us to a new attitude to children and young people that makes us include them as actors in their own rights, agents of change waiting to participate.

4. Relevant articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child

In 1994 the Afghan Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Consultation Project promotes children and young people's right to participate, expressed in these three articles in the Convention:

Article 12:
Every child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely on all matters concerning him or herself. Those views should be given weight depending on the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13:
Every child has the right to obtain and make known information and to express his or her view, unless this would violate the rights of others.

Article 15:
Every child has the right to meet with others and to join or set up associations, unless the fact of doing so violates the rights of others.

5. Family and the child

5.1 Benefits of family

The family is the heart of Afghan society. Culturally and traditionally, children's position in the family is not only in relation to parents. Siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents usually take part in the responsibility of taking care of and nurturing children[1]. For children, family is a site of anchorage, security and an essential source of love. They advice, provide stability and shelter and give structure and routine to children's lives.

Children often seek advice from adults around them. The family sets standards of conduct for girls and boys according to the framework of *'tarbia'*[2] which informs the way children earn or lose credibility for themselves and their families. Children acknowledge that learning good *tarbia* helps them in finding honorable ways to relate to others.

Family has also had the vital role of organizing and providing normality, during chaotic and desperate times. It is central to children's lives. In the consultations, children describe honor, respect, love and empathy for elders, parents, and relatives.

Being part of a family is important because it is the opposite of being alone. Children feel secure as part of families, especially children who have lost relatives during wartime. Children talk of being alone with fear and trepidation.

We are not allowed to say something bad in front of our family or parents
Girl 15-18, Jalalabad

We are not allowed to talk behind people's backs
Boy 11-14, Kandahar

When my mother is angry then I will go to her and apologize
Child 8-10, Herat

No respect to adults when they are talking makes me sad
Girl 15-18, Kabul

I'm afraid of being alone
Girl 15-18,Herat

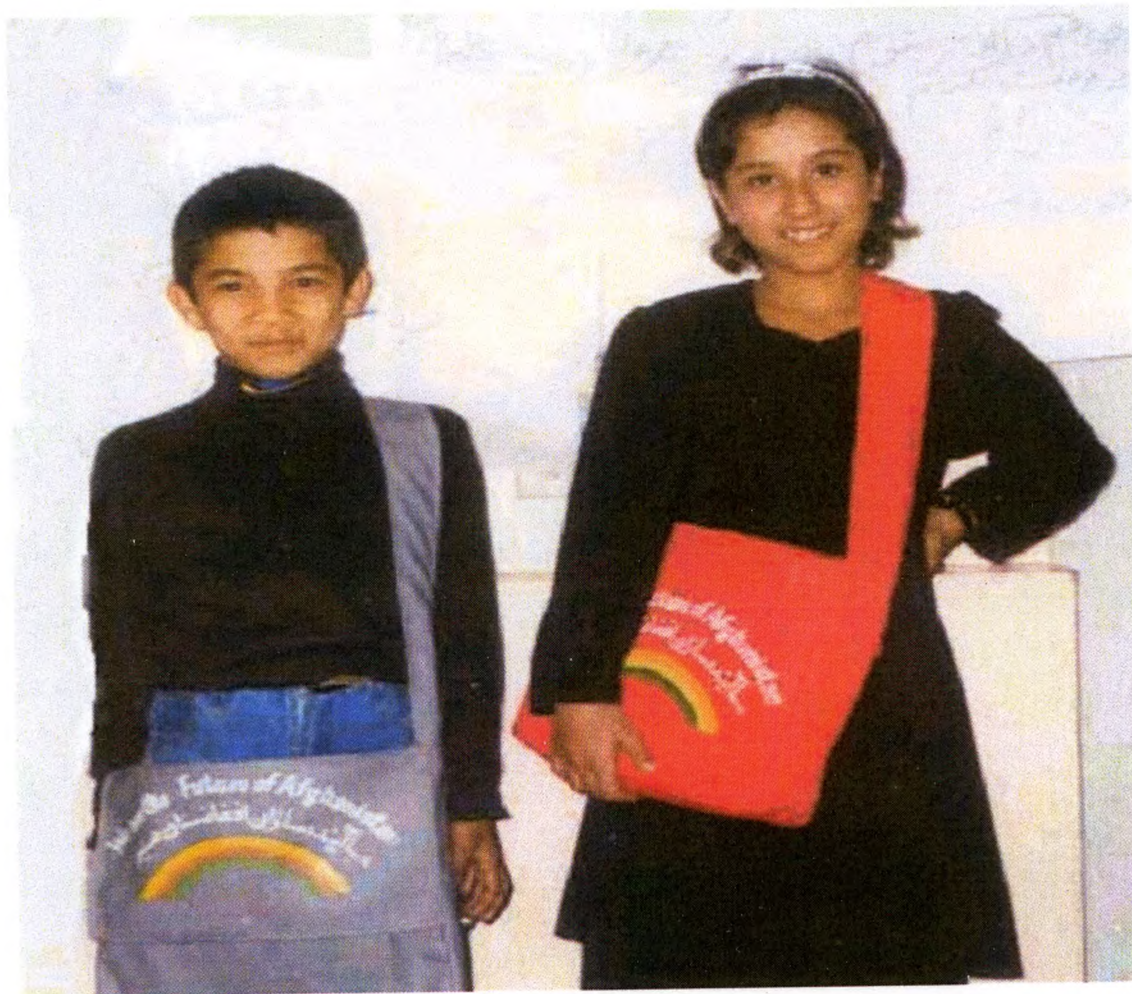
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[1] This is operationalised through the joint family system, which is commonly practiced in Afghanistan as opposed to a nuclear family system. Family arrangements are structured so that son and daughter-in-law live with the son's natal family, and women traditionally move out to live with their husband's family.

[2] 'Tarbia' (training in good manners and behaviour) is the framework in which all child behaviour is viewed in Afghanistan. It is of crucial importance that the child has good tarbia. Tarbia regulates day to day life and relationships in and outside the family. On this rests the reputation of the child, the family and may be the clan. Violation of this brings disgrace and might even ostracize the family. The framework is rooted in religion and the ensuing morality. (See Save the Children USA report " The Children of Kabul")

"We are the future of Afghanistan" Children and Young People's Consultations

An Analysis of the Children's Messages



Global Movement for Children Working Group
in Afghanistan
2003